

Love and the Brethren of Purity: A Comparative Study of Human Intimacy in Islamic Philosophy

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Abstract

This article is a study of the Brethren of Purity's thirty-seventh epistle, *The Essence of Love*. It compares this work with the treatises on love written by the Muslim philosophers Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, the leading representatives of the Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and Transcendental schools of Islamic philosophy, respectively. A fundamental distinction of the Brethren's approach is their positive impression of love between human beings, including its romantic and conjugal components. Such love is not entirely under human control; the celestial spheres also exercise their influence. The Brethren contend that society and civilization prosper because of love. Unlike several others, they are intent on reconciling divine or "real" love with love between individuals. While the Brethren praise the benefits of romantic love and conjugal relations, Ibn Sīnā judges them harmful, and Suhrawardī a distraction. Mullā Ṣadrā, though, takes an intermediate position, influenced by both the Brethren and Ibn Sīnā.

Keywords

Ikhwān al-ṣafā' – love – sexuality – Ibn Sīnā – Suhrawardī – Mullā Ṣadrā – Islamic philosophy

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Were there no heart, where would love make its home?
And were there no love, of what use the heart?

‘AZĪZ-I NASAFĪ¹

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1 Background: Studying Love

Poetry and treatises about love are legion in the Muslim world and have attracted tremendous scholarly attention. After all, the concept of love permeates Islamic tradition in fields ranging from cosmology and mysticism to anthropology and sociology.² Many Muslim thinkers undertook serious inquiries on the subject, giving it a prominent place in Islamic philosophy. They discussed the nature of love and its various dimensions, and several based their ontology on love. It was common for Muslim philosophers to distinguish between “real” (*ḥaqīqī*) and metaphorical (*majāzī*) love, the former being heavenly and divine, and the latter earthly and human.³

Many Muslim thinkers painted their musings on a canvas already colored by Platonic discussions and a Neoplatonic background.⁴ *Eros* or “love” is the subject of Plato’s (d. 348 BCE) *Symposium*. In this splendid imaginary dialogue, the attendees of a banquet deliver speeches in praise of *eros*. Pausanias (d. ca. 180 CE) distinguishes between earthly, physical forms of *eros* and

1 Translated in Shafique N. Virani, “The Dear One of Nasaf: ‘Azīz Nasafī’s ‘Epistle on Love,’” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13.2 (2009): 315.

2 Ali Altaf Mian, “Love in Islamic Philosophy,” chap. 33, in *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*, ed. Adrienne Martin (London: Routledge, 2018), 395.

3 See, for example, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī Mullā Sadrā, *al-Hikma al-muta‘āliya fī’l-asfār al-‘aqliyya al-arba‘a*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Muẓaffar, 3rd ed., 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1981), 7: 174; Mian, “Love in Islamic Philosophy,” 397.

4 Franz Rosenthal first examined the literature of the “Arabic Plato” based on literary and philological criteria. See his “On the Knowledge of Plato’s Philosophy in the Islamic World,” *Islamic Culture* 14 (1940); “Addenda to Islamic Culture, Vol. XIV, pp. 387–422,” *Islamic Culture* 15 (1941). He makes a passing reference to the modified adaptation of *eros*, particularly referring to its reception by Miskawayh (d. 421/1030). A more detailed study of Greek influence on Arabic treatises on love, may be found in Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Bruna Cassirer, 1962), 48–59.

heavenly, spiritual ones.⁵ The former's objects are mundane, while the latter's are nobler and involve the soul and intellect. This ethos sets the stage for the speech of Socrates (d. 399 BCE). The sage, citing the prophetess Diotima, evokes the concept of the *scala amoris*, the "ladder of love," which leads to contemplation of the divine. He speaks of the lower level of love in terms of physical pregnancy and its higher level as pregnancy of the soul.⁶ Levy summarizes Plato's understanding of the hierarchy of *eros* as follows:

... there is one ultimate object of love to which all the others must be tending in order for them to be objects of love at all. For those who seek to understand love, this absolute beauty, existing apart and alone, is the final goal of all their previous efforts. To achieve the vision of absolute beauty one must first progress from love of physical beauty in an individual to love of all physical beauty; then, love of beauty in the soul leads to awareness of the beauty of activities, institutions, and sciences. Upon surveying all these different kinds of beauty, one will be led to a glimpse of the science whose object is absolute beauty.⁷

Plotinus (d. ca. 205–270) would later hold that love draws lovers out of themselves as they seek to unite with their beloveds, whether earthly or heavenly. *Eros* can thus connect humanity and divinity with transformative power. Pride leads to individualism, while divine love causes the human soul to seek union with its origin, the Universal Soul, and ultimately, with the One. As such, love has the power to bestow godliness on lovers.⁸

In the realm of Islamic Studies, scholars of Sufism, in particular, have written extensively about the degrees and types of love. Louis Massignon, Helmut Ritter, Annemarie Schimmel, William Chittick, Carl Ernst, and Joseph E.B. Lumbard have all made significant contributions.⁹ The most notable terms

5 Regarding this symbolism, see John F. Miller, "The Esoteric Unity of Plato's 'Symposium,'" *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 12.2 (December 1978): 19–20.

6 Richard Rojcewicz provides some enlightening remarks on this subject in his "Platonic Love: Dasein's Urge toward Being," *Research in Phenomenology* 27.1 (January 1997): 103–20.

7 Donald Levy, "The Definition of Love in Plato's Symposium," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40.2 (April–June 1979): 286.

8 David Vincent Meconi, "Traveling without Moving: Love as Ecstatic Union in Plotinus, Augustine, and Dante," *Mediterranean Studies* 18 (2009): 4–7.

9 See, for example, Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn Ibn Mansour al-Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922: Étude d'histoire religieuse*, trans. Herbert Mason, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 4 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); (Originally published, [Paris]: Gallimard, 1975); Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, trans. Benjamin Clark,

discussed are *maḥabba* and *‘ishq*. Mohammed Arkoun argues it was likely the mystic-martyr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) who initiated the shift in emphasis from the former to the latter.¹⁰ In his article, “From ‘*Ḥubb*’ to ‘*Ishq*’: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” and later in his book *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, Lumbard demonstrates how, from the time of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 517/1123) onward, the word *‘ishq* displaced *maḥabba* in Persian Sufism as well. *Maḥabba*, indicating affection, was perhaps the more “acceptable.” Like *ḥubb*, from the same root, it was also a Quranic term. Researchers often translate *‘ishq*, the primary emotion we examine in this study, as “passionate love” to distinguish the two. In his penetrating *Ring of the Dove* (*Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*), a high mark among Arabic “Codes of Love,” the Andalusian polymath Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) analyzes how endearment (*mawadda*) develops into passionate love (*‘ishq*). Similarly, the influential seventh/thirteenth-century Central Asian mystic ‘Azīz-i Nasafī views passionate love as culminating a continuum. In his *Epistle on Love* (*Risāla fī l-‘ishq*), a section in his *Book of the Perfect Man* (*Kitāb insān al-kāmil*), he writes:

O Dervish! The first petition of all who become desirous of someone’s companionship is called “inclination” (*mayl*). When inclination increases and becomes extreme, it is called “desire” (*irādat*). When desire increases and becomes extreme, it is called “affection” (*maḥabbat*). When affection increases and becomes extreme, it is called “love” (*‘ishq*). Thus, love turns out to be extreme affection, affection turns out to be extreme desire, and so on ...¹¹

Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); (Originally published, Paris: P. Geuthner, 1922); Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn Attar*, trans. John O’Kane, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn Attār* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003); (Originally published, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Carl W. Ernst, “The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābī’a to Ruzbihān,” in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rūmī*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993); Joseph E.B. Lumbard, “From ‘*Ḥubb*’ to ‘*Ishq*’: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18.3 (2007); Joseph E.B. Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

10 Mohammed Arkoun, “*‘ishq*,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online (hereafter *EI2*).

11 Virani, “Azīz Nasafī’s ‘Epistle on Love,’” 314. Translation modified.

Ishq is the infinitive or verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the verb *‘ashaqa*.¹² Arab lexicographers commonly define it as extreme affection (*farṭ al-ḥubb*) or affection exceeding bounds (*tajāwuz ḥadd al-maḥabba*).¹³ The comprehensive *Tongue of the Arabs* (*Lisān al-‘Arab*) by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) maintains that the word for love derives from a vine called *‘ashaqa*.¹⁴ Suhrawardī was to develop this definition further, explaining that the *‘ashaqa* vine flourishes in gardens at the base of a tree. After securing its roots in the ground, it grows, wrapping itself around the tree in a strangling embrace, depriving the tree of access to all food and water.¹⁵ In the remainder of this article, we translate *‘ishq* simply as “love.” However, it should be distinguished from other related concepts, such as endearment (*mawadda*), longing or solicitude (*raghba*), and affection (*ḥubb* or *maḥabba*), which are also commonly rendered as love in English.

Most scholarly studies on love in Islamic thought focus on divine love, commonly called “real” love (*al-‘ishq al-ḥaqīqī*), rather than love between human beings, which Muslim thinkers often referred to as “metaphorical” (*majāzī*). Binyamin Abrahamov’s *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, Kazuyo Murata’s *Beauty in Sufism*, Cyrus Zargar’s *Sufi Aesthetics*, Leonard Lewisohn’s *Sufism’s Religion of Love*, and Mohammed Rustom’s “*Theo-Fānī*: Ayn al-Quḍāt and the Fire of Love” are a few of many such examples.¹⁶ Similarly, in his “Love in

12 See, for example, the oldest known Arabic dictionary, written by Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 175/791), *al-‘Ayn*, 8 vols. (Qum: Dār al-Hijra, 1989), 1: 124.

13 For the first definition see, for example, the highly influential *Crown of Language and Correct Usage of Arabic* by al-Jawharī (d. ca. 393/1003), *al-Ṣiḥā: Tāj al-lughā wa-ṣiḥāḥ al-‘Arabiyya*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ghafūr ‘Aṭṭār, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1399/1979), 4:1525. For the second definition, see *The Comprehensive Criteria of Language* by his contemporary Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004), *Mu‘jam maqāyīs al-lughā*, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1369/[1950]), 4:321.

14 Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), 10:252.

15 Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabash Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq* (*Mu’nis al-‘ushshāq*) in *Majmū’a-yi muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Tehran: Anjuman-i Shāhanshāhī-i Falsafa-yi Irān, 1373/[1954]), 3: 287.

16 Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazālī and al-Dabbāgh* (London: Routledge, 2003); Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbihān Baqlī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017); Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2011); Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love, from Rābi’a to Ibn ‘Arabi,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Mohammed Rustom, “*Theo-Fānī*: Ayn al-Quḍāt and the Fire of Love,” chap. 7, in *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*, ed. Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil, and Mohammed Rustom (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2021). See also Mohammed Rustom, *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of Ayn al-Quḍāt* (Albany: SUNY Press, in press), whose tenth chapter looks

Islamic Philosophy,” Ali Altaf Mian focuses almost entirely on the love of God.¹⁷ Jim Wafer explores the subject of love for boys in Arabic and Persian Islamic literature but focuses on the trope as a symbol for love of the divine.¹⁸ Among the most prolific scholars in this area is William Chittick in several works.¹⁹ These studies typically focus on metaphysical love, love's relation to ontology, and human love as a metaphor for divine love. Even in studies of Muslim works that delve into the phenomenon of human emotions, such as Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love* (*Risālat al-ʿishq* or *Risāla fī l-ʿishq*), scholarly attention has spotlighted the divine rather than the physical, as in Etin Anwar's article on this topic.²⁰ Valerie Hoffman-Ladd's "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life" is a rare exception, delving into considerations of celibacy and sexuality, while Arin Shawkat Salamah-Qudsi examines the ideals of family life and tendencies of celibacy.²¹ Regarding the Brethren's views on love in particular, the most noteworthy studies are Ricardo-Felipe Reyna's examination of their treatise and Nuha al-Shaʿar's "Between Love and Social Aspiration." The former discusses a panorama of works on love before providing a Spanish translation of the Ikhwān's work on this subject. The latter explores Ṣūfī and Greek influences on the concept of love in the Brethren of Purity, Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), and al-Tawḥīdī (d. ca. 414/1023).²²

at ʿAyn al-Qudāt's full doctrine of love, beauty, and the contemplation of celestial beauty in terrestrial forms.

17 Mian, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 395–408.

18 Jim Wafer, "Vision and Passion: The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 107–31; Arin Shawkat Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety: Personal and Communal Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

19 William C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*; Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," *Religion Compass* 8.7 (2014); Chittick, "Themes of Love in Islamic Mystical Theology," in *Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Mystical Perspectives on the Love of God*, ed. Sheelah Treflé Hidden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Along these lines, see also numerous passages in the following translation: Aḥmad ibn Manṣūr Samʿānī, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, trans. William C. Chittick, *The Repose of the Spirits: A Sufi Commentary on the Divine Names* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

20 Etin Anwar, "Ibn Sīnā's Philosophical Theology of Love: A Study of the *Risālah fī al-ʿIshq*," *Islamic Studies* 42.2 (2003): 331–45.

21 Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life," *Mystics Quarterly* 18.3 (1992); Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*.

22 Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ʿishq* in *Rasāʾil Ibn Sīnā*, ed. Ḥusayn Bīdār (Qum: Intishārāt Bīdār, 1400/[1980]); Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945); Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ʿishq*, vol. 3; Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya*, vol. 7; Ricardo-Felipe Reyna, "La 'Risāla fī māhiyyat al-ʿiṣq' de la Rasāʾil

It is quite understandable that the subject of divine love in Islam and its symbols in the earthly realm has fascinated scholars. Muslim literatures are a rich mine for such inquiries. However, the result has been that, comparatively, scholarship has neglected the topic of love between human beings in Islamic thought. This study, therefore, focuses on how the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*) treat this subject. It also explores the approach to this matter in treatises on love written by the leading representatives of the Peripatetic (*Mashshā'ī*), Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) and Transcendental (*Muta'āliya*) schools of Islamic philosophy, Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (known as Mullā Ṣadrā, d. 1050/1640), respectively. Specifically, the inquiry compares the Brethren's thirty-seventh treatise, *The Essence of Love* (*Fī māhiyyat al-ishq*), with Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love* (*Risāla fī'l-ishq*), Suhrawardī's *Epistle on the Reality of Love*, also known as *The Solace of Lovers* (*Risālat ḥaqīqat al-ishq* or *Mu'nis al-'ushshāq*) and sections from the seventh volume of Mullā Ṣadrā's *Transcendent Philosophy: The Four Journeys of the Intellect* (*al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliya fī'l-asfār al-arba'a al-'aqliyya*).²³

The Brethren of Purity and Friends of Loyalty (*Ikhwān al-ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'*) was a pseudonym adopted by the authors of a philosophical encyclopedia of fifty-two epistles (*rasā'il*) composed perhaps from the late third/early tenth century onward. These fifty-two epistles comprise four volumes: the Mathematical Sciences, the Corporeal and Natural Sciences, the Sciences of the Soul and the Intellect, and the Nomic, Divine, and Legal Sciences. The philosophically-inclined group with Neoplatonic tendencies sought anonymity so, unsurprisingly, there has been intense scholarly debate about its members' identities. Current scholarship widely acknowledges their affinities with Ismailism and Shī'ī thought more generally.²⁴ In the Brethren's positive

Ijwān al-Ṣafā', "Anaqueel de Estudios Árabes 6 (1995); Nuha al-Sha'ar, "Between Love and Social Aspiration: The Influence of Sufi and Greek Concepts of Love on the Socio-Political Thought of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Miskawayh, and al-Tawhīdī," in *Sources and Approaches across Disciplines in Near Eastern Studies: Proceedings of the 24th Congress of L'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. Verena Klemm and Nuha al-Sha'ar (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

23 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ishq*; Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina,"; Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ishq*, 3; Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliya*, vol. 7.

24 A useful review of the various scholarly points of view may be found in Godefroid de Callatay, "Brethren of Purity," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, Brill Online (hereafter *EI3*). His contention that "the *Epistles* appear to have remained completely unknown to the Fāṭimids" is no longer sustainable, however. In this regard, see Carmela Baffioni, "Nāṣir-i Khosrow, translator of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'?", in *Sources and Approaches across Disciplines in Near Eastern Studies*. See also Abbas Hamdani, "An Early Fāṭimid Source on the Time



FIGURE 1 The painting of the Brethren of Purity (20.2 cm × 17.3 cm) is from a manuscript dated 1287, currently housed at the Library of the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. In 2005, Erwin Jurschitza of Directmedia placed it in the public domain as part of the York Project, “10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei” (10,000 Masterpieces of Painting).

views of earthly love, to be discussed below, some may see a departure from perceived “Platonic” ideals. However, as Miller argues, even in the *Symposium*, “that moment of transcendence is always provisional at best. It never completely leaves behind the compromises of the immediate. In Diotima’s sublime speech ... the ideal of beauty is only perceptible through the flesh and blood encounter.”²⁵ Similarly, the Brethren see in earthly love the first rung of a ladder of ascent and not something to be eschewed. As with the other thinkers studied here, the Brethren’s ultimate goal is divine love. However, this does not diminish human love in their eyes. The encyclopedic work has been prominent in Islamic intellectual history, particularly for philosophy and Sufism. It impacted the work of such distinguished thinkers as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. early 5th/11th c.), Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 464/1072), and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), for example.²⁶ As Tanja Werthmann has demonstrated, the Brethren’s *Epistle on the Essence of Love* had a far reach,

and Authorship of the ‘Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’,” *Arabica* 26.1 (February 1979); Ehud Krinis, “Cyclical Time in the Ismā’īlī Circle of Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ (Tenth Century) and in Early Jewish Kabbalists Circles (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries),” *Studia Islamica* 111.1 (2016): 33. An older study, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, revised ed. ([London]: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 25–43 is still a useful overview. Much progress has been made in improving the quality of the edition of the text and the understanding of its authors since the release of the 1957 edition. Buṭrūs al-Bustānī, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’,” in *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ wa-Khullān al-Wafā’*, ed. Buṭrūs al-Bustānī, 4 vols. (Qum: Maktab al-ʿĀlām al-Islāmī, 1405/[1985]); Originally published (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), 1: 5–20. Under the general editorship of Nader El-Bizri, Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies is preparing a critical edition and translation of all the epistles, Nader El-Bizri, ed. *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and Their Rasā’il; An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008). At the time this article was prepared, the new critical edition and translation of epistle thirty-seven, *On Love*, had not been published, and so we have used the 1957 edition in our study.

25 Paul Allen Miller, “Duras and Platonic Love: The Erotics of Substitution,” *The Comparatist* 37.1 (2013): 84.

26 Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 36; Yasien Mohamed, “The Cosmology of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Miskawayh and al-Iṣfahānī,” *Islamic Studies* 39.4 (2000); Baffioni, “Nāṣir-i Khosrow, translator of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’?,” Everett Rowson, “al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī,” in *ELI2*. The Istanbul manuscript of Ibn Sīnā’s *Autobiography* also claims that the author had studied the famous *Rasā’il*. Gutas, however, has argued that this must be a later interpolation, based on Bayhaqī’s (d. 565/1170) reading of the famous philosopher’s Ismaili family connections. See Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical Works*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2014), 13n8 in which he slightly updates his argument in “Avicenna’s ‘Maḏhab’ with an Appendix on the Question of his Date of Birth,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5.6 (1987–1988): 323–24.

influencing even the *Zohar* and Jewish mysticism, including the commentary on the *Song of Songs* by Moses ibn Tibbon (fl. 1240–1283).²⁷

Nevertheless, in the field of love, the Brethren had a limited impact on the representatives of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools studied here. While their work seems to have furnished the structure for some elements of Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love*, their positive view of love between human beings is notably absent.²⁸ The contrast is itself illuminating, as it brings into relief their rather unique approach. However, their impact on the theory of love in Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendental school is evident, as he quotes their exact words in his *Four Journeys* (*al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*). In studying the Brethren of Purity's (*Ikhwān al-ṣafā*'s) thirty-seventh epistle, *The Essence of Love*, this article compares their disquisitions with the treatises on love written by the leading representatives of the Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and Transcendental schools of Islamic philosophy. After this Background, the study introduces these four representatives' writings on love; presents their definitions of love, whether explicit or implied; explores the causes of love they suggest; and analyzes the judgments they pass on love between human beings. It then probes the connection the Brethren draw between love and aesthetics, their belief that love between individuals is an essential station on the path to divine love, and their discussion of the role of love in developing society and civilization.

2 Writing about Love

The *Epistle on the Essence of Love* (*al-Risāla fī māhiyyat al-ʿishq*) is the thirty-seventh in the Brethren's collection and forms part of the volume on the Sciences of the Soul and the Intellect. It aims to discuss what love is, its various types, how it begins, its cause and reason, and its ultimate purpose.²⁹ Fackenheim considers it "probably the most explicit and important treatment of love to be found in Arabic philosophy prior to Ibn Sina."³⁰

27 Tanja Werthmann, "Spirit to Spirit': The Imagery of the Kiss in the *Zohar* and its Possible Sources," *The Harvard Theological Review* 111.4 (2018): 588, 590–94. See also Krinis, "Cyclical Time in the Ismāʿīlī Circle of Ikhwān al-ṣafā' (Tenth Century) and in Early Jewish Kabbalists Circles (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries)," 20–108. For possible influences on later Sufi views of love, see Rustom, *Inrushes of the Heart*.

28 For parallels of certain passages, see Werthmann, "Spirit to Spirit': The Imagery of the Kiss in the *Zohar* and its Possible Sources," 592–93.

29 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 269.

30 Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," 210.

The Brethren of Purity's focus on love between human beings, and commendation of this type of love, is relatively unique among the philosophers examined. By contrast, the representatives of the Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and Transcendental schools focus on divine love. This is an explicit decision of the Brethren, who write in their *Epistle on the Essence of Love*, "We intend to discuss love as the general public knows it. What they name 'love' is naught but what people feel for another human being, whether a male or a female."³¹ They mention prevailing negative opinions about love, noting that some sages had dwelt on the reprehensible nature of love, claiming it was depravity. Meanwhile, others alleged it was a spiritual or psychological illness, and yet others that it was a concern of those with too much idle time on their hands.³² Naturally, thinkers voiced such criticisms against romantic love between human beings and not love of the divine. The Brethren reject such criticisms in their entirety.

The Brethren acknowledge that there are countless varieties of affection (*maḥabba*) and objects of affection. They enumerate several of these to give a sense of the diversity: animals for coupling to perpetuate their offspring, parents for their children, leaders for authority, craftspeople for their trade and praise of their craftsmanship, scholars for the acquisition of knowledge, and people for goodness, virtue, and noble qualities. However, their own focus is the romantic affection human beings have for one another.³³ While the Brethren do not provide an explicit list of the subjects they will cover in their discussion of love, examining the progression of the treatise reveals fifteen primary topics that bear out their emphasis on the human element:

1. Quotations in praise and condemnation of love (pages 270–71)
2. Definitions of love (page 272)
3. The levels of souls in human beings (page 272)
4. Factors leading to love between humans (pages 273–76)
5. Why people differ in their selection of a human beloved (pages 276–77)
6. Tracing effects (*al-ma'lūl*) to their causes (*al-'illa*) (page 277)
7. The role of sexual desire in love (pages 277–78)
8. Types of affection and identification of love as between human beings (pages 278–79)
9. The beloveds typical of the levels of the human soul (pages 279–81)
10. Decrease in human love (page 281)
11. Persistence in divine love (pages 281–82)
12. The positive impact of love between human beings (pages 282–84)

31 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 271.

32 Ibid., 270.

33 Ibid., 278–79.

13. The ultimate goal of love between human beings (page 284)
14. The ordinary, the elite, and progress in love (pages 284–85)
15. God as the first beloved (pages 285–86)

Of these fifteen topics, eight focus on love between human beings, three discuss both divine love and love between human beings, and four are about divine love.

The Brethren's emphasis on love between individuals is conspicuous compared to the Peripatetic and Illuminist treatments. The Peripatetic Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love* (*Risālat al-ʿishq*) comprises seven sections: the power of love that pervades all beings; love's existence in simple, inanimate substances (i.e., minerals); love's existence in beings that imbibe nutrients (i.e., plants); love's existence in the animal kingdom; the love of beauty among the people of grace and chivalry; the love of divine souls; and a conclusion.³⁴ He dedicates only two of the twenty-seven pages in this treatise to love between people. As Etin Anwar argues, the work is essentially a "philosophical theology behind God's love for humans and the love that humans feel for God."³⁵ Mian, too, insists that Ibn Sīnā's theory of love must be placed in a metaphysical context to be properly understood.³⁶

The Illuminist Suhrawardī's *Epistle on the Reality of Love*, cast as a story, is a masterpiece of Persian prose.³⁷ It may profitably be read alongside other mystical and philosophical works on love such as the *Incidents of the Lovers* (*Sawāniḥ al-ʿushshāq*) of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), the *Glimmers* (*Lawāʾih*) commonly but erroneously attributed to ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), and his authentic *Preludes* (*Tamhīdāt*), the *Flashes* (*Lamaʾāt*) of ʿIrāqī (d. 688/1289) and *The Rays of the Flashes* (*Ashīʿat al-Lamaʾāt*) of Jāmī (d. 898/1492).³⁸ Suhrawardī tells the tale of how God's first creation was

34 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ʿishq*, 374–75; Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, "Risālat al-ʿishq," translated by Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 211–12.

35 Anwar, "Ibn Sīnā's Philosophical Theology of Love," 331.

36 Mian, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 401.

37 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ʿishq*, vol. 3; Yahyā ibn Ḥabash Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ʿishq* (*Muʿnis al-ʿushshāq*) in *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, *On The Reality of Love or The Solace of Lovers* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1999).

38 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits; The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London: Routledge, 2013); (Originally published, London: Kegan Paul, 1986), which references the critical edition of Ritter, along with other editions; ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (attrib.), *Risāla-yi Lawāʾih* in *Aḥwāl wa āthār-i ʿAyn al-Quḍāt*, ed. Raḥīm Farmanish (Tehran: Chāp-i Āftāb, 1959). On the misattribution, see Hermann Landolt, "ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (life and work)," in *ETI3*; Firoozeh Papan-Matin, *Beyond Death: The Mystical Teachings of ʿAyn*

Intellect, out of which emerged Beauty, Love, and Sorrow. Beauty travels to the world of humanity with Love in pursuit, accompanied by Sorrow. There follows a provocative allegory in which Beauty unites with Yūsuf, Love with Zulaykhā and Sorrow with Ya'qūb, figures of great importance in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition.

Suhrawardī's tale focusses almost exclusively on love for the divine and on metaphysical principles, as is clear from the outset:

Know that the first thing God created was a glowing pearl He named Intellect.

"The first thing God created was the intellect."

This pearl He endowed with three qualities, the ability to know God, the ability to know itself, and the ability to know that which had not existed and then did exist. From the ability to know God there appeared *Ḥusn*, who is called Beauty; and from the ability to know itself there appeared *Ishq*, who is called Love. From the ability to know that which did not exist and then did exist there appeared *Huzn*, who is called Sorrow.³⁹

Suhrawardī's belief that love arises from self-cognition accords with views of philosophers who considered love to be premised on metaphysical perfection.⁴⁰ His narrative of Love's turmoil in pursuit of Beauty, with Beauty itself being a quality of the (Universal) Intellect, is a story about divine, rather than human, love.

The Transcendentalist Mullā Ṣadrā discusses love in the latter part of the eighth "halting-place" (*mawqif*) and at the beginning of the ninth halting-place of the seventh volume of his *Four Journeys (al-Asfār al-arba'a)*.⁴¹ He explains the love that all beings have for God, incorporating many of Ibn Sīnā's views on the subject, while also critiquing some of them. He examines how beings differ in accepting God's manifestation and hence find themselves attracted to different beloveds. His discussion begins and ends with discourses on

al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010), 25–27; Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī, *Lama'āt*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1363 sh./[1984]); Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī, *Lama'āt*, trans. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Divine Flashes* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Ashī'at al-lama'āt*, ed. Hādī Rastgār Muqaddam Gawharī and Ibrāhīm Ibn Buzurgmihr (Qum: Būstān-i Kitāb-i Qum, 1383 sh./[2004]); 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, ed. 'Afīf 'Usayrān (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihirān, 1962).

39 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-'ishq*, 3:268; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 58.

40 See, for example, Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-'ishq*, 387.

41 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'aliyah*, 7:148–93.

non-divine love, including human beings' love for one another. After the Brethren, it is Mullā Ṣadrā who again delves into this type of love. He discusses this subject at the end of the eighteenth and in the twentieth chapter of the eighth halting-place in his *Transcendent Philosophy: The Four Journeys of the Intellect*.⁴² Here, his explanation of love between human beings closely parallels the Brethren's treatment.

We may at least partly attribute the varying analyses of love in the four sources to the contexts in which the authors studied it. As mentioned above, the Brethren divide their *Epistles* into four volumes. They introduce the last volume, writing, "In this fourth section, we now wish to discuss the science of divine things (*ilāhiyyāt*)."⁴³ However, they discuss Love in the third volume, which begins with the following statement, "With the completion of this epistle, we conclude our discussion the natural sciences (*al-ṭabīʿiyyāt*). We now wish to commence with the third section on the spiritual and intellectual sciences (*al-naḥṣāniyyāt al-ʿaqliyyāt*), as we promised at the outset of our book."⁴⁴ Given that they do not discuss love in the context of the volume on "divine things," the Brethren explore its human dimension, emphasizing not only the "highest rung of the ladder," as it were, but "the ladder as a whole." Meanwhile, Ibn Sīnā's and Suhrawardī's treatments of love are both found in independent treatises, not as part of comprehensive examinations of the human condition. Ibn Sīnā focuses on love for the first cause and, naturally, the emphasis is on divine love.⁴⁵ Suhrawardī's *Epistle on the Reality of Love* is even more explicitly about love as a divine phenomenon.⁴⁶

Further, as discussed in section four, below, the Brethren are unique in introducing the motions of the celestial spheres, which are beyond human control, as a significant factor in the development of love. In fact, their treatment of love follows immediately after their study of cycles and revolutions (*adwār wa-akwār*), devoted largely to the influence of the constellations on the natural world. Others, meanwhile, attribute romantic love solely to the animal soul in human beings, contributing to their negative viewpoints.

Mullā Ṣadrā, like the Brethren, treats love in a far-reaching multi-volume study that covers a range of topics. However, unlike them, he places it in the context of the divine, in the eighth stopping place, "On Divine Providence" (*fi'l-ināyat al-ilāhiyya*) and at the beginning of the ninth, "On His Effusion,

42 Ibid., 164, 171–79.

43 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 3: 401.

44 Ibid., 178.

45 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ʾishq*, 375.

46 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ʾishq*, 3: 269.

may He be exalted" (*fī fayḍihi ta'ālā*). However, as discussed below, he implicitly endorses the Brethren's acceptance of the role of the celestial spheres on romantic love. Human beings could scarcely be condemned for something beyond their control.

3 Defining Love

The Brethren account for human intimacy, including romantic love, in their definition of love, quite in contrast to scholars like Suhrawardī who consider it detrimental to the pursuit of true love.⁴⁷ In seeking to understand love, the Brethren first examine various definitions. Some philosophers believe love to be intense or excessive affection for and a powerful attraction to a particular type, person, or thing, to the exclusion of others. This causes lovers to remember the object of their love constantly, directing their attention to it beyond bounds.⁴⁸ The Brethren reject this definition, writing, "If we define love in this manner, every human being without exception would be in love, since everyone inclines toward or has affection for something to the exclusion of others. Ironically, many of the wise and the physicians refer to such a state as melancholy."⁴⁹ They also aver that human love must be distinguished from attraction to things. While they do employ the word "love" for things, in explaining their definition, they suggest that there is a difference between genuine love for another human being, and love for other things. Love for things can occasion melancholia, but not genuine love for another individual.⁵⁰

The Brethren go on to cite two additional definitions prevalent among scholars. The first states that love is an overwhelming desire in the soul (*hawā ghālib fī'l-nafs*) of human beings toward another like them physically or by nature.⁵¹ Such a definition excludes love of things or God. While this is not the Brethren's preferred definition, they do not explicitly criticize it.⁵² The Brethren's favored understanding, which they refer to as "the best and most

47 See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 273.

48 Ibid., 271. al-Sha'ar, "Between Love and Social Aspiration," 26.

49 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 271.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 272. The expression "a form like theirs in genus" (*ṣūrah mumāthila fī'l-jins*) most likely refers to those of similar "nature" rather than those who share the same genus as human beings, which would include animals. This is suggested because the Brethren had previously argued that affection for anything other than human beings could not be considered love.

52 Ibid.

accurate definition,” is that “love is the intense longing for unification” (*shiddat al-shawq ilā’l-ittihād*). Thus, regardless of the lovers’ state, “they yearn for a state that brings them closer to the beloved.”⁵³

Following the discussion of definitions, the Brethren are very clear about love’s physical dimensions. While acknowledging in their preferred definition that true unity is one of the special feature of spiritual beings, they note that this is approximated in the physical world through proximity, mingling, and touch.⁵⁴ For example, they note that human beings achieve bodily union in many ways. In embracing and kissing one another, the lover and beloved exchange saliva. This eventually reaches the liver and penetrates the bloodstream through the natural digestive processes to flow through the entire body by way of the veins and arteries. In this manner, it ultimately becomes part of the very flesh, nerves, blood, and physical being of the partner.⁵⁵ Similarly, in their intimacy, the lover, and beloved share their very breaths, the breath of one entering the other. This air enters the lungs, permeates the bloodstream, flows to the brain and the heart, and reaches all parts of the body.⁵⁶ Thus, in the case of love between human beings, “the intense longing for union” results in an explicitly physical merging on many levels.

The Brethren’s definition encompasses both human intimacy and divine love. They explain that “when union is the desire of the soul (*hawā’ nafsānī*) and a spiritual effect (*ta’t’hīr rūḥānī*), we should recall the types of souls and their beloveds, along with their causes and reasons.”⁵⁷ Invoking the three “souls” or “faculties” within a human being, they indicate that these must have three objects of love. The desirous vegetal soul (*al-nafs al-nabāṭiyya al-shahwāniyya*) loves sustenance and reproduction, the irascible animal soul (*al-nafs al-ghaḍabīyya al-ḥayawāniyya*) loves dominance and leadership, and the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) loves the sciences, truths, and virtues.⁵⁸ In acknowledging these aspects of humanity, the Brethren study a range of love, from carnal to divine, under a single rubric.

Interestingly, the Brethren do not single out love for another human being as a desire of the rational soul, which might suggest that only corporeal love is possible. However, if we consider the rational soul’s inclination for the sciences, truths, and virtues, it is likely the Brethren viewed this aspect of human intimacy in such a context. In defining love with reference to the hierarchy

53 Ibid.

54 al-Sha’ar, “Between Love and Social Aspiration,” 26.

55 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il*, 3: 274.

56 Ibid., 274–75.

57 Ibid., 272.

58 Ibid.

of the soul and by including conjugal love in their definition, the Brethren indicate that human intimacy falls within this “intense longing for union.” The representatives of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools did not share this positive definition of romantic love.

As opposed to his treatment in *The Book of Definitions* (*Kitāb al-ḥudūd*) and *The Deliverance* (*al-Najāt*), Ibn Sīnā does not delve deeply into the definition of love in his *Epistle of Love* (*Risālat al-‘ishq*), which is his primary text examined in this comparative study. In this epistle, he restricts his definition of the nature of love to “appreciating good and admiring what is in harmony with the soul.”⁵⁹ His approach differs from that of the Brethren and includes many instances that they would not consider genuine love. Unlike the Brethren, he does not differentiate between love for other human beings and desire for objects or other beings. He defines love for human beings as “desiring a beautiful face” and thus potentially includes conjugal relations.⁶⁰

While Suhrawardī does not provide a detailed definition of the term love in his treatise, he indicates that the Arabic term *‘ishq* means *mihr* or “kindness” in Persian, and that it is based on self-knowledge.⁶¹ He also explains: “When affection (*maḥabba*) reaches its limit, it is called love. ‘Love is excessive affection’ (*maḥabba mufrīṭa*).”⁶² This is one of the definitions provided by the Ikhwān (though not their preferred definition) and the one adopted by Ibn Sīnā. These presage ‘Azīz-i Nasafī’s treatment cited above. Thus, love (*‘ishq*) may be considered an extreme case of affection (*maḥabba*), or more narrowly defined than affection, as “all love is affection, but not all affection is love.”

Mullā Ṣadrā, clearly under the influence of the Brethren, defines love as “the intense longing for union.”⁶³ Considering this a precise definition, he attributes it to “some philosophers.”⁶⁴ Like Ibn Sīnā and unlike the Brethren, his definition does not countenance sexual or carnal love. In common with Ibn Sīnā, Mullā Ṣadrā defines love broadly. It encompasses animals’ love for reproduction, parents’ love for their children, leaders’ love for authority, people’s

59 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-‘ishq*, 377; Ibn Sīnā, “Treatise on Love,” 213.

60 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-‘ishq*, 386.

61 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, 3: 268–269; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 58.

62 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, 3: 286; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 71.

63 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-muta‘āliya*, 7: 177. Relevant keyword searches in the extensives databases of the Markaz-i taḥqīqāt-i kamyūtar-i ‘ulūm-i Islāmī (Nūr), suggest that this definition did not exist before the Brethren proposed it, and that those who followed adopted the definition from them. See “Markaz-i taḥqīqāt-i kamyūtar-i ‘ulūm-i Islāmī (Nūr),” ed. Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Bahrāmī, “Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences,” Website Database, Qum: Noorsoft, access date: March 31, 2021, <https://www.noorsoft.org/fa/Default>.

64 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-muta‘āliya*, 7: 177.

love for their crafts and professions, scholars' love for acquiring knowledge, and love of goodness and benevolence.⁶⁵ An explicit mention of romantic love between human beings is noticeably absent. By the phrase "human love" (*al-ʿishq al-insānī*), Mullā Ṣadrā implies love that develops in a human being, not necessarily love between human beings.⁶⁶ He divides this into two types: real (*ḥaqīqī*) and metaphorical (*majāzī*). Real love is affection for God, His attributes, and His actions. He further divides metaphorical love into spiritual (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*ḥayawānī*), the former rooted in a connection between the spirits of lover and beloved, and the latter based on physical attraction.⁶⁷

4 The Causes of Love

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the Brethren's treatment of love between human beings is their discussion of its origins. It is not only earthly, but celestial, the design of the planner of the universe. They distinguish between the *ʿilla* and *sabab* of love, both words commonly translated as "cause." To the Brethren, the *ʿilla* of love is an intrinsic cause within the human soul while the *sabab* is extrinsic.⁶⁸ This scheme allowed them to posit external factors to the development of love in a human being's soul.

The Brethren hold that love begins with a single glance. This glance is like a seed planted in the ground. Further glances and attention cause this seed to sprout as the lover longs to draw near the beloved.⁶⁹ As love grows, the lover seeks solitude with the beloved, then to kiss and embrace, and then share a bed and have conjugal relations.⁷⁰ This initial love can only occur, however, if extrinsic forces are involved. These are the work of the celestial spheres and beyond the control of human beings.⁷¹ They attribute both the origin and vagaries of love to the spheres' vicissitudes and transmutations throughout the year, the planets' positions in their various constellations, and similar factors.⁷² Love between human beings is thus part of the divine plan.

65 Ibid., 165.

66 Ibid., 174.

67 Ibid.

68 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 3: 269, 272.

69 Ibid., 273.

70 Ibid., 274.

71 Ibid., 275.

72 Ibid. We may note the prominence of similar sentiments about astronomy among Twelver Shīʿī authors. For example, the prolific Safavid period scholar Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī writes in his compendium of traditions, *The Ample*, "events in this realm of generation and corruption occur according to the exigencies of the movements of the

The Brethren identify sexual desire in the human soul as the third cause of love. Even this operates under the influence of the celestial spheres. As mentioned above, within the human being exist the desirous vegetal soul, the irascible animal soul, and the rational soul.⁷³ When the vegetal soul predominates, so does carnal desire; when the animal soul does, so does the desire to predominate over others; and when the rational soul does, human beings incline to knowledge and virtues.⁷⁴ Circumstances at the time of birth, however, predispose human beings to particular inclinations. Those born under the moon's influence or that of Venus and Saturn incline to food and drink, those under a different configuration to lust and sexuality, others to the desire for dominance, and yet others to knowledge and justice.⁷⁵ In a treatise on the sperm, though, the Brethren emphasize that only God knows the details of how the celestial spheres influence human beings.⁷⁶ Regardless, it is clear that the Brethren believe that factors beyond human control influence love between people.

Like the Brethren, Ibn Sīnā also invokes the intrinsic factor of the levels of the soul in accounting for the causes of love. He notes that the characteristics of the animal soul are essential, even praiseworthy, in human beings. It is when they are excessive and harm the rational soul that they must be eschewed. The animal and rational souls both admire grace and harmony, such as the expertly blended tastes in a well-prepared meal. However, they do so for different reasons. This is instinctive for the animal soul. Meanwhile, the rational soul recognizes in harmony the balance and unity characteristic of the divine beloved. These are ever more visible as it approaches the divine. The more remote something is from the divine, the more it exhibits disharmony and multiplicity. When a person's longing for a beautiful beloved is specific to the animal soul, it results in vice. However, when there is a balance between the animal and rational souls' desire, this is praiseworthy. The rational soul longs for beauty that recalls the First Influencer and Pure Beloved (*al-mu'aththir al-awwal wa'l-ma'shūq al-mahd*).⁷⁷ Thus, Ibn Sīnā considers love between human

celestial spheres that are subject to God." *al-Wāfi*, ed. Ḍiyyā' al-Dīn Ḥusaynī Iṣfahānī, 26 vols. (Iṣfahān: Maktabat al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī al-Āmma, 1406 sh./1986), 1: 508. See also Muḥammad Bāqir ibn Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār al-jāmi'a li-durar akhbār al-a'immā al-aṭhār*, ed. 'Abd al-Zahrā' 'Alawī, 3rd ed., 110 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī wa-Mu'assasat al-Wafā', 1403/1983), 26: 113.

73 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 272.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 273.

76 Ibid., 2: 417–18.

77 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ishq*, 386; Ibn Sīnā, "Treatise on Love," 220–21.

beings to be the subject of volition. Love should maintain a balance between the animal and rational faculties. However, he explains, rational love can only be pure when the animal soul is subdued.

As is evident from the *Epistle on the Reality of Love*, Suhrawardī believes the pursuit of perfection causes love. In his tale, Beauty (or Goodness, *Ḥusn*) has two names: Loveliness (*Jamāl*) and Perfection (*Kamāl*). Both physical and spiritual beings seek Perfection, and therefore Beauty. Achieving Beauty is only possible through Love. We can deduce from his narrative that he considers love between human beings to be volitional. Human beings can safeguard themselves from lower, human love by strengthening the spirit and seeking Perfection.⁷⁸ Suhrawardī's disciple, Shahrazūrī, points to internal causes to explain the origin of love.⁷⁹ In this respect, his analysis parallels Ibn Sīnā's.

The Brethren's conception of love's causes heavily influences Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendental Philosophy. The sage contemplates both intrinsic and extrinsic factors of love. Unlike other views he presents, he does not critique the idea of the stars and planets' effect, implicitly endorsing this concept.⁸⁰ Like many other thinkers considered here, intrinsically he refers to the human soul's levels as occasioning love. Love is of two types, real (*ḥaqīqī*), which is for the divine, and metaphorical (*majāzī*). There are also two types of metaphorical love: spiritual (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*ḥayawānī*), the former when the lover's soul is attracted to the beloved's inner beauty, and the latter to the beloved's external charms.⁸¹

5 Judging Love

The Brethren of Purity's *Epistle on the Essence of Love* stands apart from its three counterparts. As opposed to the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools' representatives, the Brethren have a positive assessment of human affections, including romantic love. Perhaps to the dismay of many, Ibn Sīnā's and Suhrawardī's works are far less accommodating of this natural human emotion. The Brethren hold that the ultimate purpose for love in human souls, of people's longing for elegance and desire for beloveds, is to rouse them from the slumber of neglect and heedlessness. It allows them to ascend from the

78 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-ʿishq*, 3: 284–285; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 70–71.

79 Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shahrazūrī, *Rasāʾil al-shajara al-ilāhiyya fī ʿulūm al-ḥaqāʾiq al-rabbāniyya*, 3 vols. (Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Hikmat wa Falsafa-yi Irān, 1383 sh./[2004]), 3: 648.

80 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikma al-mutaʿaliya*, 7: 176.

81 Ibid., 174.

realm of sensual, physical love to the ranks of spiritual, intellectual love for the divine.⁸² Thus, the Brethren's philosophy, far from denigrating love between human beings, views it as preparing them to love their Creator.

In response to allegations that human love occupies idlers with too much time on their hands, the Brethren write:

Love releases the human soul from all cares save cares for the beloved. Lovers are constantly engrossed in thoughts of the beloved, and their hearts are in a tumult and bewildered for the beloved. Love is hardly what occupies idlers, as those who know nothing of secret matters and subtle mysteries like to allege. Such people understand aught save what their senses perceive and fail to grasp what requires a limpid mind, excellent discernment, much reflection, intense investigation, and keen vision.⁸³

The Brethren soundly reject the views of those who consider human love a spiritual illness. In their view, those who allege this do so because "they see that insomnia, weight loss, sunken eyes, a rapid pulse, and constant sighs afflict lovers, much as they do those with other ailments."⁸⁴ Such diagnoses fail to understand the true nature of love. According to the Brethren, love is a divine blessing and gift for creation that leads people to adopt noble virtues and forsake noxious habits.⁸⁵ In accounting for the benefits of human love, the Brethren clarify that both worldly and otherworldly love are praiseworthy.

Ibn Sīnā's views stand somewhat in contrast. While he acknowledges human attraction to beautiful people, he quickly distinguishes between rational attraction and what he terms animal desires (*al-shahwāt al-ḥayawāniyya*).⁸⁶ Desires based on physical or "animal" nature rather than reason are defects in the human soul. "If human beings fall in love with beautiful faces for the sake of animal desire, they are not only blameworthy but deserving of censure like a sodomite."⁸⁷ Along these lines, in his *Canon of Medicine* (*al-Qānūn fī'l-ṭibb*), he discusses love as an ailment to be treated:

Love is a disease of temptation, and its symptoms resemble those of melancholia. This illness is caused when someone is fully engrossed in images and reverie and lost in thought. It is possible that this longing

82 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 282.

83 Ibid., 270.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., 279.

86 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-īshq*, 387; Ibn Sīnā, "Treatise on Love," 220–21.

87 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-īshq*, 387; Ibn Sīnā, "Treatise on Love," 221.

occasions the illness, but it may be that the patient's fixation and infatuation bring on the illness.⁸⁸

He adds, "We have seen a lover whose weight loss was so severe he was wasting away. He contracted many serious and chronic diseases and suffered from a long-term fever."⁸⁹ Ibn Sīnā even prescribes treatments for love similar to those for melancholia.⁹⁰ He considers human love to be worthy only if it has a divine aspect, writing:

When human beings fall in love with a comely face with intellectual considerations, we should consider this a means of upliftment and increase in nobility. This is because they draw near to the influence of the First Influencer and the Pure Beloved and come to resemble the noble exalted beings. Elegance and grace are bestowed upon them. Thus, the beauty of the human form regularly occupies the hearts of the wise and people of refinement.⁹¹

Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā looks askance at intercourse, which he views as specific to the animal soul. Hugging and kissing, however, might involve an element of the rational soul. Intercourse is to be desired only for the rational purpose of propagating the species, not for pleasure, and certainly not outside the bonds of marriage. It is, therefore, incumbent to subdue the animal faculty so that the rational faculty may prevail.⁹²

Suhrawardī, too, draws a sharp distinction between real love and sexual desire. In his allegory of the handsome Yūsuf, he writes:

Love took Sorrow by the sleeve and went in pursuit of Beauty. As he approached, he saw Beauty so mingled with Yūsuf that there was no difference between the two. Love ordered Sorrow to pull the chain of humility. From Beauty's court a voice cried out, "Who is it?" Love replied in the tongue of ecstasy: "Your servant returns wounded to your bosom.

88 Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn al-Ḍinnāwī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Muḥammad 'Alī Bayḍūn, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1420/1999), 2: 112.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., 113, 137.

91 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ishq*, 387. Cf. Ibn Sīnā, "Treatise on Love," 221.

92 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-ishq*, 388; Ibn Sīnā, "Treatise on Love," 221–22.

This helpless one left on foot but returns crawling.” Beauty placed the hand of indifference against the breast of entreaty.⁹³

In Suhrawardī’s tale, as in Muslim literature generally, Yūsuf epitomizes physical and spiritual beauty.⁹⁴ Beauty, however, is indifferent to Love’s entreaties. The reason soon becomes apparent. Suhrawardī’s continuation of the allegory makes his condemnation of romantic love clear. Love and Zulaykhā meet Yūsuf upon his arrival in Egypt. Suhrawardī contrasts Zulaykhā’s initial and later encounters with her beloved. She tells Love of Yūsuf’s arrival and they rush to meet him: “When Zulaykhā beheld him she wanted to go forward, but her heart’s foot struck the stone of amazement, and she fell out of the circle of patience. She stretched out the hand of blame and ripped the veil of chastity from herself and, all at once, turned melancholic.”⁹⁵ Driven by desire and impatience, Zulaykhā’s overtures are rebuffed. However, later in the story, Love and Beauty reunite. This reunion occurs when Ya’qūb arrives in Egypt with his sons, and along with Sorrow, enters the palace:

Suddenly he saw Joseph seated with Zulaykhā on the throne of regality. He signaled to Sorrow. When Sorrow saw Love he knelt in servitude to Beauty and placed his face on the ground. Ya’qūb and his sons did as Sorrow had done and all placed their faces to the ground.⁹⁶

93 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, 3: 271; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 60–61. Throughout, we maintain the Arabic names Yūsuf and Ya’qūb, rather than Joseph and Jacob found in the English translation. On the reception of this tale in several regional contexts, see Thibaut d’Hubert, “Foundational *Maḥabbat-nāmas*: Jāmī’s *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* in Bengal (ca. 16th–19th AD),” in *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī’s Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century*, ed. Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2018); and in the same volume: Ayesha Irani, “Love’s New Pavilions: Śāhā Mohāmmad Chagīr’s Retelling of *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* in Early Modern Bengal”; Luther Obrock, “Śrīvara’s Kathākautuka: Cosmology, Translation, and the Life of a Text in Sultanate Kashmir”; C. Ryan Perkins, “A Bounty of Gems: *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* in Pashto.”

94 See, for example, the account of the well-known Muslim historian and Qur’an commentator al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who describes Yūsuf as having “more beauty than any other human being,” and who narrates a tradition of the Prophet: “Joseph and his mother were given half of the beauty in the world.” See *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l mulūk*, trans. William M Brinner, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Prophets and Patarchs*, 39 vols. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 2: 148.

95 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, 3: 283; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 69.

96 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, 3: 284; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 70.

In this, likely the only one of Suhrawardī's known writings in which he addresses romantic love, he suggests in symbolic language that Zulaykhā only achieved union with Yūsuf when she freed herself of physical desire. The very reason for Love's disgrace is because when the real beloved, Beauty, manifested in the earthly realm, the City of Adam, Love has no strength to unite with him, loses his footing, and falls into a corner.⁹⁷ In separation, Love causes chaos in Egypt, wandering like a shameless, unrestrained dervish (*qalandar-wār khalī' al-'idhār*). Separated from Beauty, Love ogles every beautiful lad and enters every corner, but finds no satisfaction.⁹⁸ Only "one who knows the way" can release Love from its misery. The solution lies in a journey of nine stages to the City of the Soul (*Shahristān-i Jān*), where the gate is guarded by a man who is both young and old, eloquent and mute, whose name is Eternal Intellect (*Jāwīd Khirad*). The sword of knowledge is required to reach this spiritual city. At every turn, distractions tempt the seeker who must remain steadfast. Only after surmounting the temptations does the aspirant arrive and bathe in the waters of eternal life.⁹⁹

Suhrawardī's disciple Shahrazūrī (d. after 683/1284) explicates his master's views on love in his *Epistles of the Divine Tree about the Sciences of Lordly Truths* (*Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya fī 'ulūm al-ḥaqā'iq al-rabbāniyya*), a study that very much resembles Ibn Sīnā's.¹⁰⁰ Shahrazūrī enumerates three goals for austerities, the third of which is to render the inner heart absolutely pure and subtle to prepare the soul to accept the intellectual forms and heavenly radiance.¹⁰¹ One tool to achieve this goal is love.¹⁰² However, he is clear that he is not speaking of romantic love, but a love stationed in the rational soul. He divides metaphorical (*majāzī*) love into two types: spiritual (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*ḥayawānī*). The former results from the resemblance between the substance (*jawhar*) of the lover's and beloved's souls, and the lover's longing to enjoy the beloved's morals and character. Meanwhile, lust and fulfilling animal desire occasion the latter, as the lover longs for the charms of the beloved's face and body. This type of love causes the animal soul to predominate. It is a tool in the service of sin and indecency.¹⁰³

97 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-'ishq*, 3: 282; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 69.

98 Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-'ishq*, 3: 274; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 63.

99 Yahyā ibn Ḥabash Suhrawardī, *Opera metaphysica et mystica: Edidit et prolegomenis instruxit Henricus Corbin*, ed. Henry Corbin (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1945); Suhrawardī, *Fī ḥaqīqat al-'ishq*, 3: 275–81; Suhrawardī, *Reality of Love*, 64–68.

100 Shahrazūrī, *al-Shajara al-ilāhiyya*, 3: 626–29.

101 Ibid., 645.

102 Ibid., 648.

103 Ibid.

Mullā Ṣadrā, representing the school of Transcendental (*Mutaʿālīyya*) Philosophy, sometimes concurs with the Brethren's positive opinion about the value of romantic love. He rejects those who consider it an illness and agrees with the Brethren about the important role love plays in the aesthetic sense, as described below.¹⁰⁴ However, he also adapts contrary passages from Ibn Sīnā.¹⁰⁵ Like many others, he distinguishes real (*ḥaqīqī*) from metaphorical (*majāzī*) human love. The latter, as in Shahrāzūrī, is further subdivided into spiritual (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*ḥayawānī*). As in Shahrāzūrī, spiritual love results from an essential resemblance between the lover's and beloved's souls and the wonder evoked by the attributes of the beloved. Meanwhile, physical attraction, lust, and the wonderment aroused by the face and body of the beloved typify animal love. Mullā Ṣadrā informs us that this type of love takes root in the sensible soul and often gives rise to immorality. He condemns animal love, which he equates with sexual desire. However, so long as carnal motivations are absent, spiritual love between individuals is virtuous and has positive effects. The commentary resembles Ibn Sīnā's, except that Mullā Ṣadrā places restrictions on spiritual love. Those who express the virtue of spiritual love to other human beings have transcended the animal soul but have yet to arrive at the level of pure intellect (*al-ʿaql al-mujarrad*). For those who arrive at this stage, attaining perfection, even spiritual love between individuals is no longer honorable.¹⁰⁶

Mullā Ṣadrā notes that the ancient philosophers differed, with some praising and some condemning love. He attributes this difference of opinion to confusion between chaste, spiritual love (*al-ʾishq al-ʿafīf al-naḥsānī*) and animal desire (*al-shahwa al-bahīmīyya*). The subtlety of the soul and its attraction to qualities such as judicious temperament, balance of form, and physical allures give birth to the former. Meanwhile, lust spawns the latter.¹⁰⁷ Mullā Ṣadrā's stance thus concurs with elements of both the Brethren's and Ibn Sīnā's treatments. While he sees a positive role for romantic love, it is only a virtue if rooted in the rational soul.

104 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿālīyya*, 7: 171, 175, 186.

105 See, for example, *ibid.*, 173.

106 *Ibid.*, 174.

107 *Ibid.*, 175.

6 Love and Aesthetics

Aesthetics play an important role in the Brethren's account of the lover's longing for the beloved. To them, beauty involves harmony between the senses and objects of sense. For example, color, shape and their existence in proper proportions delight the sight. Hearing is attracted to sounds and melodies, admiring what is in harmony. All the senses have similar examples.¹⁰⁸ The Brethren recognize human beings differ in their aesthetic preferences. One person may love a particular food, drink, or song that another despises.¹⁰⁹

The Brethren hold that the aesthetic allures of the beloved's corporeal form attract the lover. These enticements captivate lovers so that when they separate from the beloved, they remember the image, face, and beauty of the one who attracted them.¹¹⁰ The case of a lover long separated from the beloved illustrates this memory's power. During this spell, the beloved's features fade with age. When they reunite, the lover finds the same beauty in the beloved, recalling it as though nothing had changed. When the lover realizes that the apparent charm continues to abide in the mind while it has disappeared from the beloved, he awakens from the sleep of negligence. He now rises from the level of materiality to that of spirituality, distinguishing between body and soul.¹¹¹ The Brethren thus maintain that human love's goal is to elevate the human soul from attraction to what is tangible and physical to what is abstract and spiritual. It is only through corporeal love that humankind's aesthetic sense guides it toward its transcendent object. Through falling in love with another's mortal allure, the lover may become accustomed to beauty and ultimately recognize its essence. The Brethren therefore see inherent value in bodily attraction and training the aesthetic sense, as it leads to a sublimation that allows people to recognize true beauty.

7 An Essential Station on the Path to Divine Love

The Brethren argue that love for other human beings results in love for the divine.¹¹² To them, God is "the first beloved (*al-ma'shūq al-awwal*), and all the creatures long for Him, and incline toward Him. To Him return all matters,

108 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 276.

109 Ibid., 275.

110 Ibid., 282–83.

111 Ibid., 283.

112 Ibid., 284–85.

because He is the source of their existence, their substance, continuity, and perfection. He is the pure existence (*al-wujūd al-mahḍ*).¹¹³

As their consideration of human love includes its romantic components, sexual love is part of this process. Love of physical allure guides lovers' aesthetic senses, directing them toward the divine possessor of real and eternal beauty.¹¹⁴ However, the Brethren emphasize that just as the desirous vegetal soul (*al-naḥs al-shahwāniyya*) does not long for domination, and the irascible animal soul (*al-naḥs al-ḥayawāniyya*) does not crave science and virtues, the angelic soul (*al-naḥs al-malakīyya*) does not incline to flesh and blood. Instead, it seeks to ascend to the heavenly kingdom.¹¹⁵ Human intimacy and divine love are independent in the sense that they result from different levels of the soul. This leads it to love the Creator rather than creation and the hereafter rather than the world. It thus comes to resemble the Universal Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*) of the celestial sphere.¹¹⁶ Ascension to this level and understanding of true beauty is only possible through training the aesthetic sense, a practice that involves corporeal love.

This ultimate goal is essential. The Brethren write, "Know that there are those who are afflicted with the love of another human being, undergoing the attendant trials and tribulations and succumbing to such situations, yet whose souls are not aroused from the sleep of negligence, such that they would be consoled and reconciled, or who forget the beloved and become afflicted by the love of someone else. Such souls are drowned in their own blindness, drunk in their ignorance."¹¹⁷ For the Brethren, the danger does not lie in human intimacy, but that this love does not awaken lovers from the slumber of ignorance, spurring them to seek divine love.¹¹⁸ In this context, they cite a verse of the renowned but biographically obscure pre-Islamic poet Imru' al-Qays (d. ca. 550):

113 Ibid., 286, as translated in al-Sha'ar, "Between Love and Social Aspiration," 33.

114 We may fruitfully compare the Brethren's views with the later views of Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). In his *Breaking of Two Desires* (*Kasr al-shahwatayn*) in the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*), the famous thinker holds that besides the benefit of continuing the human species, human sexuality is worthy for another reason. In his view, sexual pleasure allows human beings a foretaste of paradise and felicity. See his *Riyāḍat al-naḥs wa Kasr al-shahwatayn min Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, ed. Timothy Winter, *On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Great Shelford, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2016), 358.

115 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 279–80.

116 Ibid., 285.

117 Ibid., 284.

118 In this regard, see also al-Sha'ar, "Between Love and Social Aspiration," 27.

Tasllat 'amāyāt al-rijāl 'an al-ṣibā
*Wa mā in arā 'anka'l-ghawāya tanjali*¹¹⁹

Men's folly ends with boyhood
 Yet I see you not saved from seduction¹²⁰

The poet juxtaposes two stages of life: boyhood and manhood. While folly is typical of youth, it is a necessary stage on the way to maturity. There is nothing unusual about it. Similarly, the Brethren suggest, physical affection toward another human being is necessary and appropriate at a certain stage. However, it should be the cultivating ground of love for the divine.

8 Love in the Development of Societies and Civilizations

Many Muslim savants contemplated the role of love in society and civilization. In considering this question, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), one of the foremost early Arabic philosophers, distinguished between volitional and non-volitional love.¹²¹ A mother, for example, loves her child unconditionally and non-volitionally as kinship is at the root of this love. Volitional love arises from common teachings, customs, and rituals. It is what unites people and groups. al-Fārābī calls this "sharing in virtue."¹²²

The Brethren also envisioned a role for human affection in promoting society and civilization. They maintain that teachers' solicitude and affection (*raghba wa-maḥabba*) for their pupils is essential to the students' education and refinement. These are requisite for great civilizations. Nations that

119 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 284. On this poet, see Said Boustany, "Imru' al-Ḳays b. Ḥudjir," in *EI2*. In some other collections, the couplet is rendered as follows:

"*Tasllat 'amāyāt al-rijāl 'an al-ṣibā*
Wa laysa fu'ādī 'an hawāka bi-munsālī"

See, for example, Nashwān ibn Sa'd al-Ḥimyārī, *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm*, ed. Muṭahhar 'Alī Iryānī, Yūsuf Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh, and Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh 'Amrī, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, 1999), 5: 3187.

120 In translating the couplet, we have understood the preposition 'an in the sense of *ba'd* or "after," in accordance with many authorities, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Yūsuf Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī al-labīb 'an kutub al-a'arīb*, 2 vols. (Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh al-Mar'ashī, 1404 sh./[1984]), 1: 148.

121 On al-Fārābī, see Damien Janos, "al-Fārābī," in *EI3*; Sadeq Sajjadi and Sayyad Javad Tabatabai, "al-Fārābī," in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary, trans. Alexander Khaleeli, Online (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2018).

122 Mian, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 400.

lack such emotions eschew learning, craft, and culture.¹²³ According to the Brethren, this motivates the learned to pass on their knowledge and skills to others. Once parents have raised their boys, these youth need teachers to complete their training in knowledge and crafts. Solicitude and affection for the youth is fundamental to convey culture and civility to them, perfecting their education.¹²⁴ This type of affection, the Brethren hold, is typical of nations interested in learning, crafts, literature, and mathematics, such as Persia, Iraq, Syria, and Rome. Nations lacking in this quality are backward.¹²⁵ Plato's *Symposium* seems to have influenced these ideas.¹²⁶

While Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī do not express similar sentiments, Mullā Ṣadrā, representing the Transcendental school, elaborates two different viewpoints. The Brethren heavily influence the first:

This love, by which I mean ardent attraction to the beauty of a lovely face and fervent affection for someone who possesses grace, elegant form, and charming characteristics, is present and innate in the souls of the peoples of most nations. It is neither artificial nor abnormal. Love is thus something inevitable, part of a beneficial and wise divine plan. Surely, it is commendable and praiseworthy, especially if it transpires between virtuous people for the sake of sublime goals.¹²⁷

Hence, Mullā Ṣadrā considers physical attraction, particularly “between virtuous people for the sake of sublime goals” to be commendable. Drawing on the Brethren but replacing their “solicitude and affection” (*raghba wa maḥabba*) with subtle love (*al-‘ishq al-laṭīf*), he states: “We find that this subtle love (*al-‘ishq al-laṭīf*) is present in most people in nations that are taught knowledge, fine arts, etiquette, and mathematics, such as the Persians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Romans.”¹²⁸ Despite the passage of centuries, Mullā Ṣadrā names the same nations as the Brethren. He concludes that in one case love culminates in intercourse between partners. However, with masters and students, it results in “training boys, educating, civilizing, and refining youth, and teaching them sciences such as syntax, language, eloquent expression, and geometry, as well as

¹²³ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3: 277.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett and Albert A. Anderson (Millis, MA: Agora Publications, 2003), 9–13.

¹²⁷ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-muta'ālīya*, 7: 172.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

fine crafts, praiseworthy etiquette, delicate metrical poetry ... and so forth."¹²⁹ He explains:

Once parents have sufficiently trained children and youth, their charges need to be educated by teachers and instructors who look upon them with attention and favor occasioned by compassion and kindness. Therefore, divine providence has placed in the souls of grown men a solicitude and love for youth and affection for youthful boys, handsome of face. This motivates them to inculcate etiquette in their pupils, to civilize them, and to perfect their deficient souls ... God would not frivolously and for no good reason have created this solicitude and love in most people of grace and learning. Certainly, placing this spiritual love in gentle souls and tender hearts ... has a wise benefit and sound purpose ... Assuredly, this love's existence in human beings counts among their virtues and laudable qualities, not among their vices and evils. By my life! This love frees the soul from all worldly cares save one – yearning to witness human beauty in which are many of the traces of God's own beauty and majesty.¹³⁰

9 Conclusion

This study placed the Brethren of Purity's treatise on love in juxtaposition with comparable treatises of Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, and Mullā Ṣadrā. The Brethren's positive view of human intimacy stands out in its assessment of this phenomenon as normal and instinctual with beneficial social effects and not entirely under human beings' control.

The Brethren's views are in sharp contrast with those of Ibn Sīnā, who considers love between human beings to be a disease and mental disorder, and those of Suhrawardī, who deems love between people to be a distraction at best. In this regard, Mullā Ṣadrā's assessment draws on elements from the philosophies of the Brethren and Ibn Sīnā. Influenced by and elaborating on the Brethren's opinions, he lays out the positive educational and social effects of love between individuals. At the same time, under the influence of Ibn Sīnā, he divides love between human beings into two types: spiritual (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*ḥayawānī*). In language similar to Ibn Sīnā's, he values love between individuals only when it is devoid of sexual desire.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The Brethren see human intimacy, including romantic and carnal love, as falling within their definition of love as being “the intense longing for union.” However, for Ibn Sīnā, love means “appreciating good and admiring what is in harmony with the soul.” Human intimacy in general and conjugal relations in particular do not find a comfortable place in Ibn Sīnā’s conception. Suhrawardī, too, offers an interpretation in which love between individuals plays no salutary role. Mullā Ṣadrā adopts the Brethren’s definition on the one hand, but on the other, like Ibn Sīnā, minimizes the role of love between human beings.

The Brethren laud the positive educational and social effects of affection and love. Love guides the sense of human aesthetics and leads humankind to divine love, rather than distracting from it. It motivates people to achievements in education, work, crafts, and civilization. While all the other philosophers dwell mostly on love for the divine, the Brethren, while not ignoring the divine by any means, dedicate most of their treatise to love between individuals.

The other significant feature of the Brethren’s treatment is their consideration of factors beyond human control as operative in fostering love between people. Love is thus a component of the divine plan and influenced by the celestial spheres. For Ibn Sīnā, by contrast, love between individuals is a completely human matter, arising from the animal soul’s domination. It is not part of a greater universal order, and conjugal relations are only acceptable when engaged in for the logical purpose of maintaining the species, and for the greater aspiration of divine love. Suhrawardī’s suggestion that the search for perfection causes love connects the concept solely to divine love. Love between human beings is a distraction. Mullā Ṣadrā, once again, shows multiple influences. Like the Brethren, he seems to acknowledge the power of the celestial spheres. At the same time, he considers the animal soul’s dominance to be of tremendous import.

In his article on love in the erudite *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the late Mohammed Arkoun discerned three main lines of development among Muslim authors of the classical period from al-Daylamī to Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb: natural love, intellectual love, and divine love.¹³¹ Hitherto, scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on the worthy area of divine love. We hope this article helps open the door to studying other aspects of love in Muslim tradition that also deserve attention.

131 Arkoun, “ishk,” in *EI*2.

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